



# Sage Grouse Initiative



- Remove threats to sage-grouse and improve sustainability of working ranches
- Implement enough of the right practices in the right places to benefit populations
- Assess effectiveness, quantify benefits, adapt program delivery, and tell the story



# SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE (SGI) PROGRAM OVERVIEW

NRCS launched the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) in 2010 as a highly targeted and science-based landscape approach to proactively conserve sage-grouse and sustain the working rangelands that support western ranching economies. This innovative partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, non-profit groups and businesses all embrace a common vision – achieving wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching.

You can learn more about the partnership by visiting:  
**[sagegrouseinitiative.com](http://sagegrouseinitiative.com)**





SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE

Wildlife Conservation Through Sustainable Ranching

ABOUT

OUR WORK

NEWS  
& RESOURCES

SAGEBRUSH  
COMMUNITY

GET INVOLVED

Search



## CONVERSATION SPROUTS CONSERVATION.

Fences to lean on, pots of coffee and a desire to do right by the land spur a growing list of on-the-ground successes.

Trust & Credibility ►



# ***“What's good for the bird, is good for the herd”***

## Good for both

- Large, intact landscapes
- Healthy perennial grasses/forbs
- Invasive species management
- Well-designed grazing plan

## Bad for both

- Fragmented landscapes
- Overgrazing, depleted perennial plants
- Conifer encroachment
- Weeds/annual grasses

**Shared Vision**  
**Wildlife conservation through  
sustainable ranching**



# NRCS Programs/WLFW

## Technical Assistance Program

- Conservation planning assistance only



## Financial Assistance Programs

- ▶ EQIP
- ▶ Cost-share for practice implementation
- ▶ Typically 3-5 year contracts

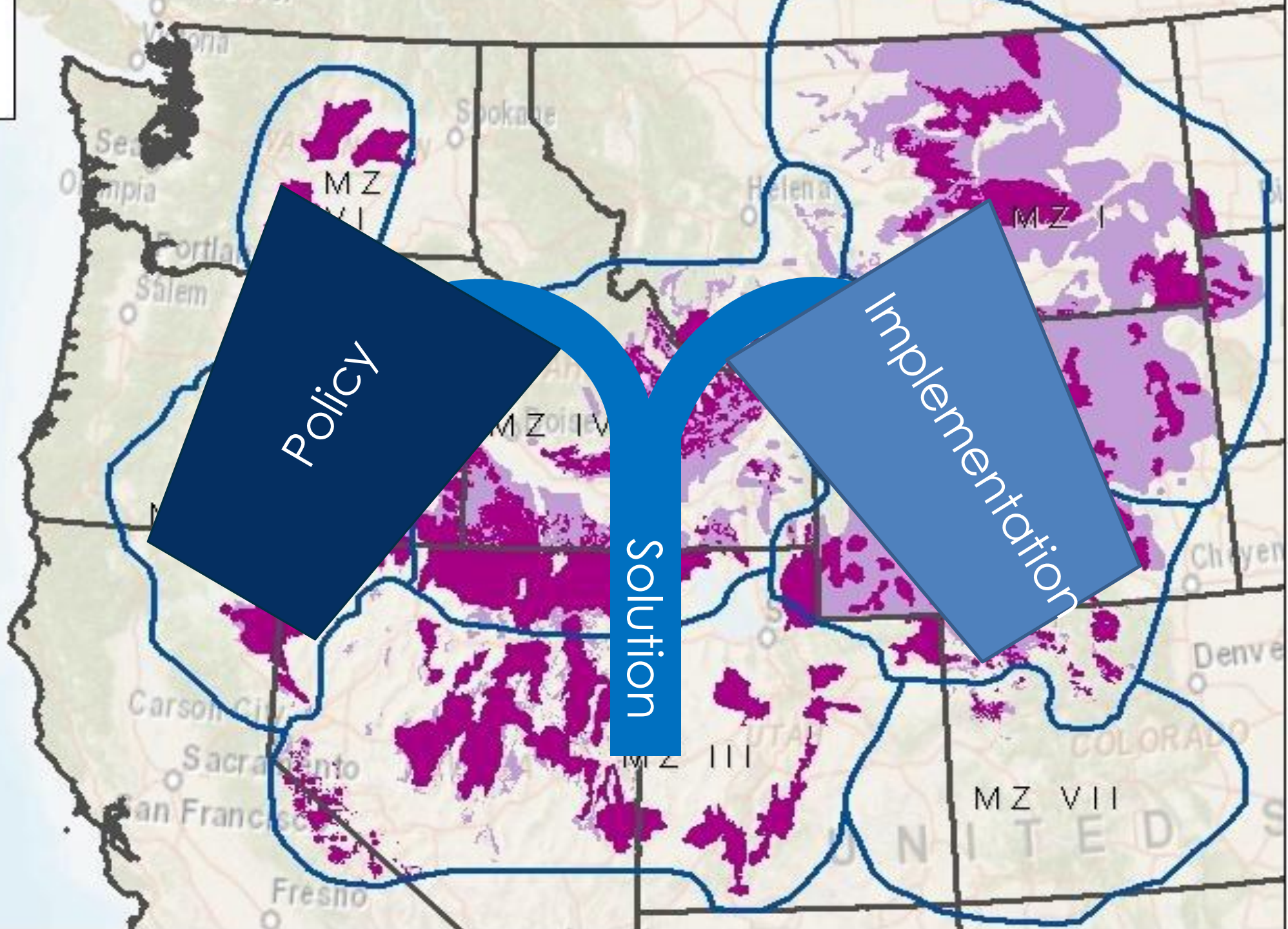
## Easement Programs

- ▶ ACEP- ALE/WRE
- ▶ Permanent easements, long-term rental agreements

## Science Support

- CEAP, CIG, SWAT





Policy

Solution

Implementation

# SAGE GROUSE LISTING DETERMINATION

Conservation efforts, like SGI, led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in September 2015 to conclude that the species did not warrant protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

What does this mean for Wyoming and SGI 2.0?

**ACTION:** Notice of 12-month petition finding.

**SUMMARY:** We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce a 12-month finding on petitions to list the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), both rangewide and the Columbia Basin population, as an endangered or threatened species

under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). After review of the best available scientific and commercial information, we find that the Columbia Basin population does not qualify as a distinct population segment. In addition, we find that listing the greater sage-grouse is not warranted at this time. However, we ask the public to submit to us any new information that becomes available concerning the threats to the greater sage-grouse or its habitat at any time.



# PREDICTABILITY FOR PAST AND CURRENT SGI PARTICIPANTS

Why this is important for Wyoming Landowners.

**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**



**Working Lands for Wildlife**  
*Greater Sage-Grouse*

### ***ESA Predictability Frequently Asked Questions***

***What is Working Lands for Wildlife?*** Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is a partnership between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The partnership provides participants with Endangered Species Act (ESA) predictability for their voluntary conservation activities. These efforts will help restore populations of specific declining species and strengthen rural economies by protecting the productivity of working lands.




Photo credit - Magnus Manske

***Greater Sage-Grouse***

***What am I responsible for if I create more habitat for the greater sage-grouse?*** Through WLFW, participants receive ESA predictability connected to the WLFW conservation practices and measures with “incidental take” coverage through July 30, 2040. By

8.50 x 11.00 in.

# WYOMING GOVERNOR MEAD'S SAGE-GROUSE EXECUTIVE ORDER (2015-4)

Impacts to WY NRCS:

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Habitat/Sage-Grouse-Management>



**EXECUTIVE ORDER 2015-4  
ATTACHMENT C**

**Exempt (“de minimis”) Activities**

The following are considered “de minimis” activities:

1. Drilling and outfitting of agricultural or residential water wells (including tank installation, pumps, and agricultural water pipelines) more than 0.6 miles from the perimeter of an occupied lek. Construction within 0.6 miles is allowed from July 1 through March 14, after a habitat evaluation has occurred, and provided development does not occur on the lek. New tanks shall have escape ramps.
2. Electric utilities are obligated by regulation to serve customers with safe and reliable electric service. Likewise, utilities must comply with agency Greater sage-grouse protective stipulations. In order to allow electric utilities the operational ability to provide and maintain service to their customers while affording adequate protection for Greater sage-grouse, distribution lines within 0.6 miles from an occupied lek are considered “de minimus” provided that: (1) construction of lines occurs from July 1 through March 14; (2) such lines are not constructed on the lek itself; and (3) a habitat evaluation has occurred. For general and operational maintenance activities of existing distribution lines, the electric utility shall use appropriate/applicable Best Management Practices for electric utilities (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee 2015). Coordination of ongoing activities with Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) is encouraged.
3. Preventative or required county road maintenance activities within the right-of-way (blading/smoothing, filling pot holes, graveling, culvert replacement, right-of-way



United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources  
Conservation  
Service  
August 2015

- Developed in Spring 2015
- \$211 million NRCS investment through 2018
- Increased prioritization
- Much greater emphasis on fire and invasive species
- Goal of fully eliminating threats in some areas
- Emerging opportunities



# WYOMING SGI 2.0 BUSINESS PLAN



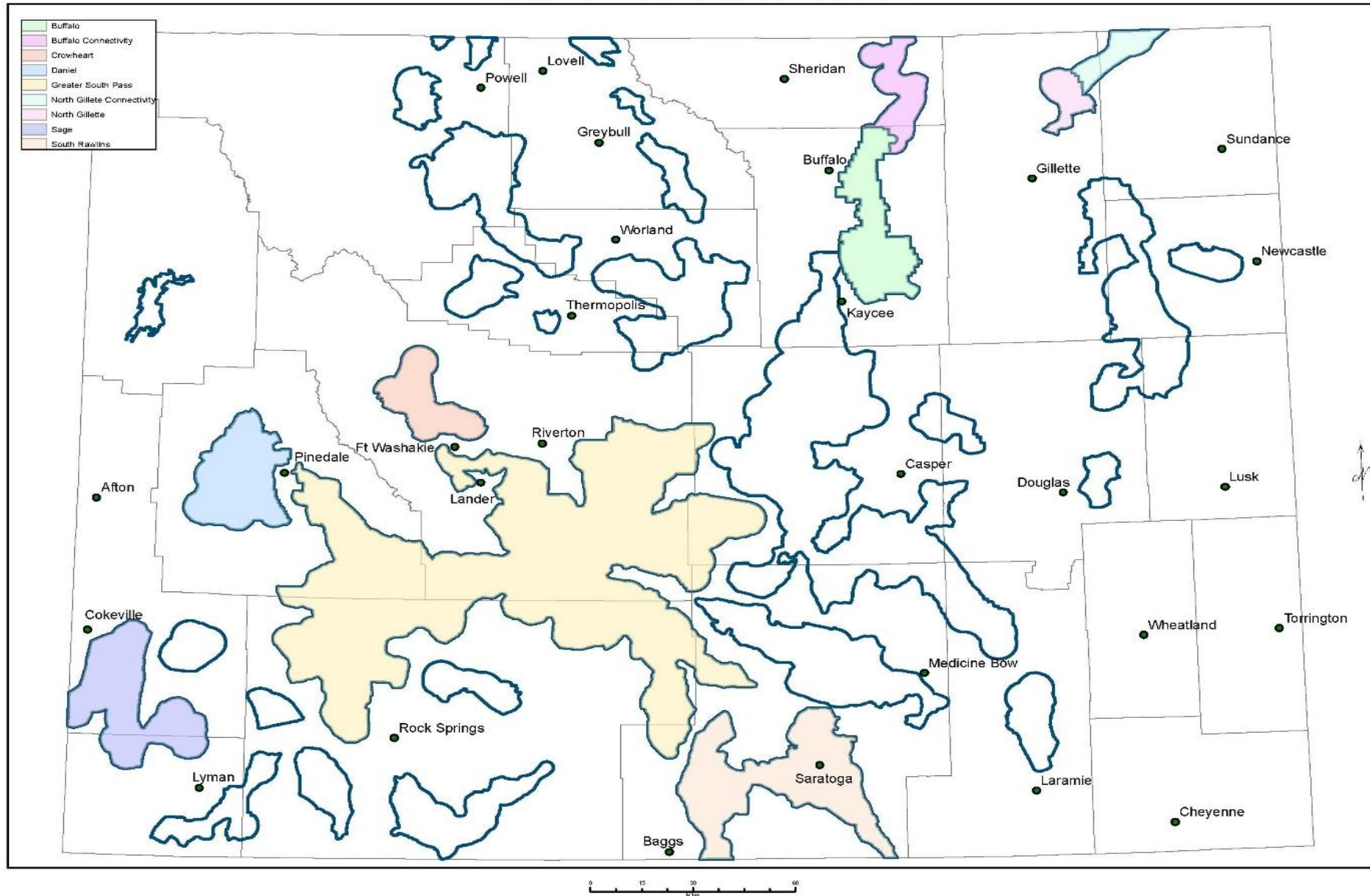
## Wyoming Conservation Easements

- Permanently protecting sage grouse habitat from increasing development pressure, with primary focus on landscape urbanization using conservation easement dollars and leveraged funds from Land Trusts and the State of Wyoming.
- From 2010-2014 we were involved in 181K acres of conservation easement
- Priority will be given to properties located in areas identified as having high sage grouse value with high development potential as indicated by Copeland et al (2013).

Fiscal Year	Progress Measure (Units: ac, mi, etc.)	Resource Need (Farm Bill FA-\$)	Program (EQIP, ACEP, CSP)
2015	33,000 acres expected in applications for FY15 (FY15 goals 0 acres per allocation)	\$9 million expected in applications for FY15 (current FY15 allocation is \$0.0)	ACEP-SGI
2016	35,000 acres	\$10 million	ACEP-SGI
2017	35,000 acres	\$10 million	ACEP-SGI
2018	35,000 acres	\$10 million	ACEP-SGI
Total		\$40 million	ACEP-SGI



# Priority Core Areas for Conservation Easements



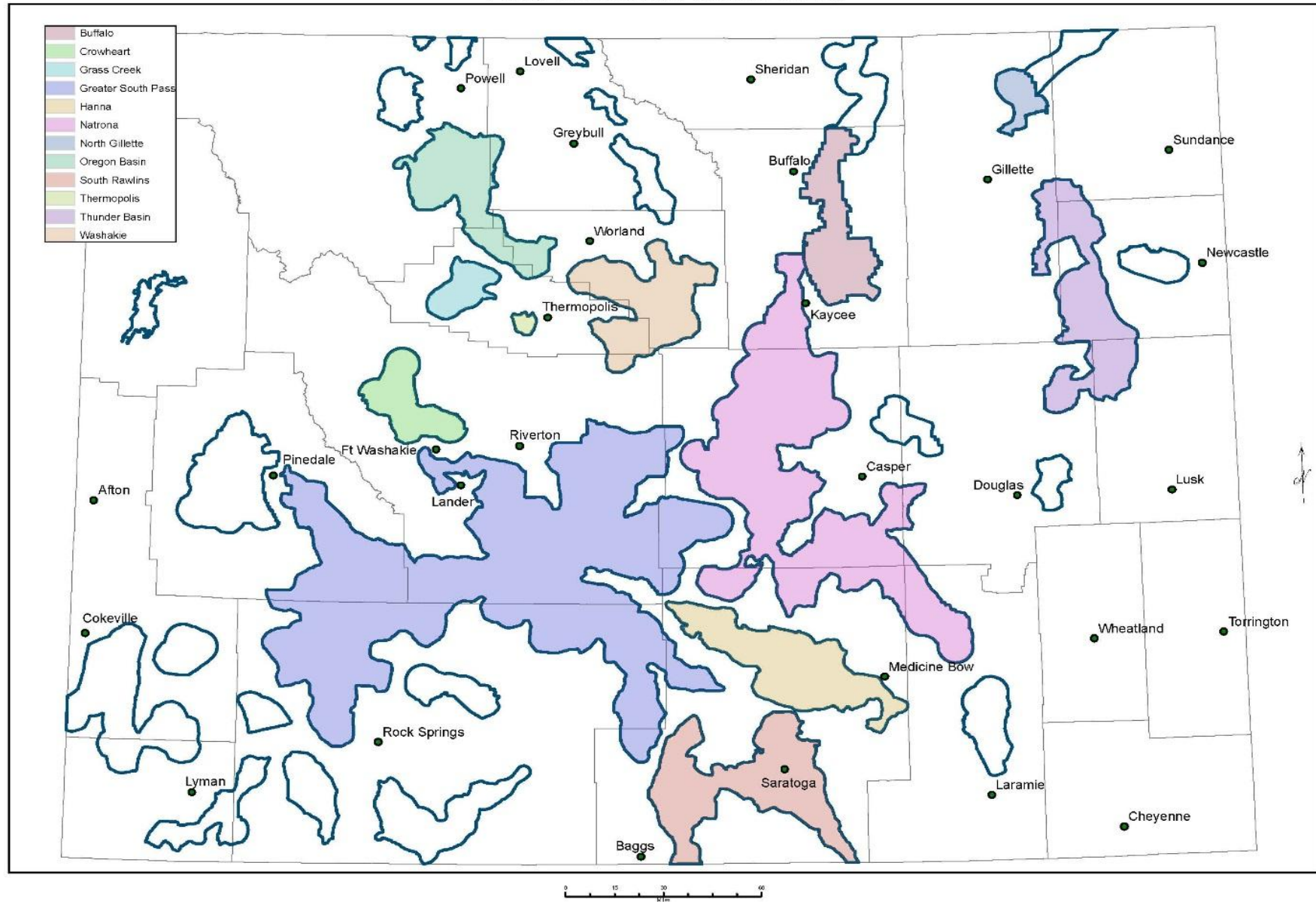
## How we are going to use the EQIP – SGI program in Wyoming:

- Applying Prescribed Grazing (528) and facilitating practices like fence (328), livestock pipeline (516) and watering facility (614).
- Between 2010 and 2014, we developed plans on 993,000 acres.
- Continue to plan, contract and implement the same level of acres and practices as we have.

Fiscal Year	Progress Measure (Units: ac, mi, etc.)	Resource Need (Farm Bill FA-\$)	Program (EQIP, ACEP, CSP)
2015	200,000 acres	\$2,100,000	EQIP, CSP
2016	200,000 acres	\$2,000,000	EQIP, CSP
2017	200,000 acres	\$2,000,000	EQIP, CSP
2018	200,000 acres	\$2,000,000	EQIP, CSP
Total	800,000 acres	\$8,100,000	EQIP, CSP



# Priority Core Areas for Prescribed Grazing

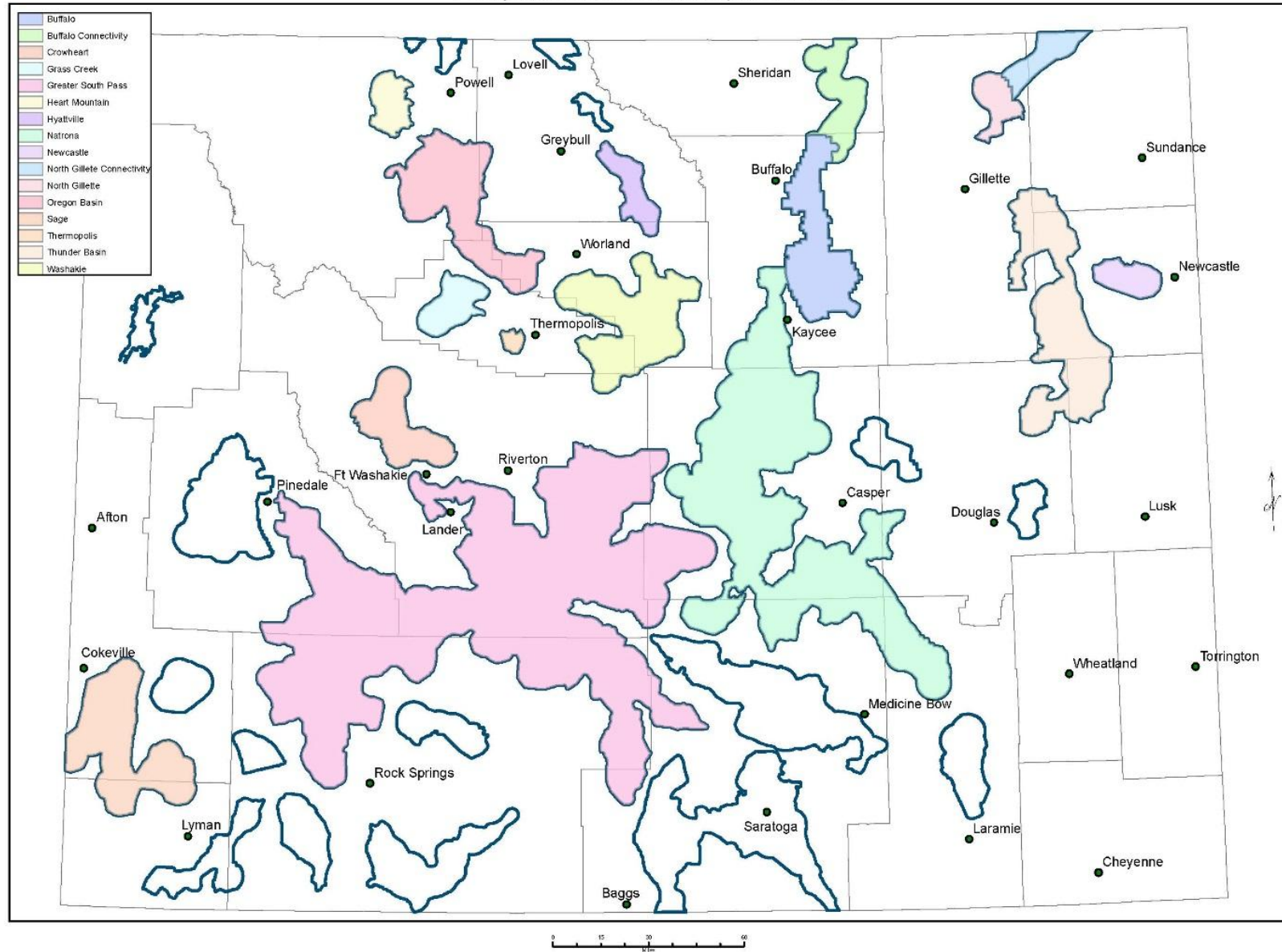


## How we are going to use the EQIP – SGI program in Wyoming:

- Controlling invasive conifers and cheatgrass using practices 314 (Brush Management) and 315 (Herbaceous Weed Control).
- These practices will be targeted in and near PAC areas that are known to have conifers invading sagebrush habitat and cheatgrass invasion levels that threaten to alter the fire regime of the sagebrush ecosystem. Special emphasis will be given to areas that may have a lower resistance to invasion and lower resilience if substantial disturbance does occur as indicated in Chambers et al (2014).
- Only done about 1,200 acres of 314 the last 4 years in WY. Huge growth industry 😊
- Partners?
- Bio-Control?
- Coupled with 528?

Fiscal Year	Progress Measure (Units: ac, mi, etc.)	Resource Need (Farm Bill FA-\$)	Program (EQIP, ACEP, CSP)
2015	314- 200 acres	\$24,000	EQIP
	315- 100 acres	\$3,000	
2016	314- 1000 acres	\$120,000	EQIP
	315- 10,000 acres	\$300,000	
2017	314- 5,000 acres	\$600,000	EQIP
	315- 25,000 acres	\$750,000	
2018	314- 10,000 acres	\$1,200,00	EQIP
	315- 100,000 acres	\$3,000,000	
Total	314- 16,200 acres	\$1,944,000	EQIP
	315- 135,100 acres	\$4,053,000	

Priority Core Areas for Invasive Species Control





# How we are going to use the EQIP – SGI program in Wyoming:

## **Dispersed Actions or Newly Emerging Opportunities (≤25% of resources)**

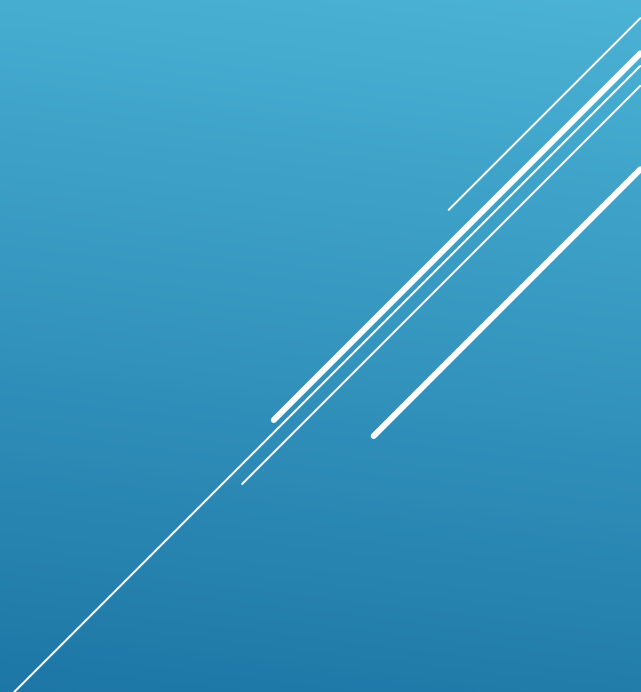
- Easements, Prescribed Grazing (528) and Invasive Control (314 and 315) outside of priority areas
  - If there is landowner interest and a sage grouse threat exists outside of the priority areas identified for easements, prescribed grazing and invasive control, we will still consider funding the project if it can benefit sage grouse. However, priority for outreach and ranking will be given to the priority areas identified for those practices.
- Control of invading Russian olive on important brood rearing and summer habitat using practice 314 (Brush Management)
  - We will work with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to identify ephemeral draws and wet meadows that have become invaded by Russian olive in priority sage grouse habitat.
- Establishing Firebreaks (394) in important sage grouse areas.
  - We are awaiting recommendations from the BLM's Fire and Invasives Action Team (FIAT) on placement of Firebreaks within WY.
- Wet Meadow Restoration using a variety of practices.
  - We will prioritize wet meadow restoration to important wet area in Wyoming that will soon be identified using the same methodology used for the SGI Science to Solution 4 publication.

# HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Sign-up if you are an agricultural producer

Encourage ag producers you interact with to participate

Let us know about project opportunities



# QUESTIONS?

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